

## Angels or Demons?\*

### Divine Messengers in Ancient Egypt

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The question of angels in Ancient Near Eastern literature is quite as problematic as an inquiry into demons. Both terms are grounded in a specific Christian theology and based on a monotheistic concept of God.<sup>1</sup> The 'good angel' and the 'bad demon' are part of a dualistic and ethical-religious worldview which is characteristic for Judaism, Islam and Christianity.<sup>2</sup> For comparative religion and the wider religious history, the two terms are merely misleading. Nevertheless, they have been used as categories for decades and via Christian adoption have become part of European history of science.<sup>3</sup> When looking for the specific meaning and relevance of supranatural or intermediate beings, scholars have become used to referring to angels or demons, often in ignorance of the specific problems of such an approach. However, the dualism of angels and demons includes a polarisation which makes sense within the context of the prevalence and professionalisation of a monotheistic religion.<sup>4</sup> But because of the inherent notion that it is possible to assign the 'good' and the 'bad' to respective sides, it should not be used in the study of religions.<sup>5</sup>

In the following inquiry into concepts of divine messengers in Ancient Egypt it is necessary (i) to start with some systematic considerations before (ii) analysing the material itself. In conclusion (iii) there is a short summary containing the main points highlighted in this article.

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1 For the term 'plausibilisation' see Gladigow, *Gottesvorstellungen* 47f.

2 See Ahn, *Grenzgängerkonzepte* 1f.

3 Cf. the argumentation of Lang, *Zwischenwesen* 416f.

4 See Ahn, *Grenzgängerkonzepte* 9f. and also Lang, *Monotheismus* 154f.

5 See Ahn, *Grenzgängerkonzepte* 2 and for the apologetic notion of this concept Lang, *Zwischenwesen* 418, and Habermehl, *Dämon* 203.

## 1. Intermediate Beings in Egyptian Polytheism

Angels like demons are representatives of a dualistic worldview. Therefore in the field of comparative religion they stand for a "Eurocentrism" when theoretical concepts grounded in a monotheistic understanding of the divine (of God) are transferred to the general history of religions.<sup>6</sup> If we step aside from this approach of older research, the polytheistic systems and their processes of differentiation and systematisation become interesting. Burkard Gladigow has already pointed out that polytheistic religions include systematizations by distinguishing different gods by means of specific concepts of order.<sup>7</sup> This forms the foundation of a worldview, which could be described as "embedding" the religion.<sup>8</sup> Each part of life is connected with a religious aspect, is determined by religion; birth, growing up and death, war and peace, agriculture and politics – everything is subordinated to religious precepts. This is tied up with the concept that all parts of nature or the world are "filled by deities".<sup>9</sup> For Ancient Egypt, Jan Assmann has called this a "cosmotheistic" concept of world. By this he means that for the Egyptian religion it is not the faith in a transcendental god which is characteristic, but rather that the understanding of the divine character of the world itself is the starting point for religious speculation.<sup>10</sup> This includes a second aspect: the differentiation of the pantheon by main supraregional and small regionally defined gods. The crucial point is that in Egyptian religion these deities are not static, but rather part of a complex interaction. The god Amun for example can be worshipped as local god (e.g. as "Amun-Re of Hibis" or "Amun of the southern Helopolis")<sup>11</sup> and at the same time as a supraregional deity of the whole land. In the 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty already his main title documented this, being called the king of gods: "Amun on the top of Karnak, lord of the thrones of the two lands."<sup>12</sup> During the New Kingdom Amun in association with the sun-god Re becomes the main deity of Egypt: He was worshipped not only in the Great Temple of Karnak but also in the

6 For further information see Ahn, *Grenzgängerkonzepte* 8f.; 17f., who has shown, that this concept was used in former times by scholars of religious studies. For the term 'Eurocentrism' see Ahn, *Eurozentrismen* 45.

7 See Gladigow, *Plenitudo deorum* 3.

8 See Bremmer, *Götter* 3.

9 Gladigow, *Plenitudo deorum* 7.

10 See Assmann, *Weisheit* 241.

11 Leitz, *Lexikon* 309 and 327.

12 Otto, *Amun*, 243. See for the meaning of the god Koch, *Geschichte* 243f.

Egyptian provinces in Syria-Palestine.<sup>13</sup> Such combinations of gods are typical for the religious system of Ancient Egypt. The god Ptah for example was the god of craftsmen, and can also be associated with creation. On the other hand he was associated with Sokar, who was a god of the dead, like Ptah-Sokar. The same can be seen in the female goddess Isis, which could be combined with Hathor to Isis-Hathor. The examples show that in Egyptian religion one and the same god can appear as a regional as well as a subordinated deity in reference to another god, and also as the superior unit for another deity. In Egyptology this connection of different gods already has been referred to as 'hyphenated gods'.<sup>14</sup> In this context Hans Bonnet in his "Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte", which appeared in 1952, used the rather unfortunate term "Syncretism".<sup>15</sup> Moreover, we should speak of a dynamic system of religion, whereby the functions represented by gods can change as the case arises. Therefore the concepts of god entail "something fluid, never completed, constantly changing".<sup>16</sup>

Following on this, a second aspect which is crucial for the topic of this article becomes apparent: the ambiguity of Egyptian gods. Single gods can be associated with both positive as well as negative significance. One prominent example is the goddess Hathor. She appears in literary texts and in iconographic material as a cow goddess, who is seen as wife or as mother of Horus. In the temple of Deir el-Bahri on the western bank of Thebes a relief shows Hathor as a larger-than-life cow, protecting the king standing under her head.<sup>17</sup> Due to the ambiguous character of Egyptian gods, Hathor can appear as a goddess of love and fertility, and at the same time as a goddess of destruction.<sup>18</sup> In the mythological tale "The Destruction of Mankind"<sup>19</sup> it is Hathor who was sent by the sun god Re to punish mankind. The text relates that "Mankind plotted against him (the sun-god), while his majesty had been growing old."<sup>20</sup> The crucial point of this passage is that it is not only an example for the negative acceptance of the goddess Hathor but

13 For the connection with Re see Koch, *Geschichte* 247. See for the material of Syria-Palestine (especially the stela of Ramsesses II from Bet-Shean) Schipper, *Vermächtnis* 256.

14 See Koch, *Geschichte* 40.

15 Koch, *Wesen* 66f.

16 Hornung, *Der Eine* 99 (Translation: BUS).

17 See Wilkinson, *Gods* 140, with a picture of a statue from the 26th dynasty showing Hathor as a cow with the officer Psametik.

18 See Daumas, *Hathor* 1029.

19 In Egyptology the text is also known as "The Book of the Cow of Heaven", although this book contains also other texts, see Lichtheim, *Literature* II 197.

20 See for the translation Lichtheim, *Literature* II 198, and Assmann, *Ägypten* 139.

that it also provides an impression for the concept of divine messengers in Ancient Egypt. Hathor, basically one of the most important deities of Egyptian religion, appears as a messenger of the god Re with a purposeful function. This can be seen in one passage of the text which contains a dialogue between the sun god Re and a council of gods (V.44-48):

"They said to his majesty:  
"Let your Eye go and smite them for you, those schemers of evil!  
No eye is more able to smite them for you.  
May it go down as Hathor!"<sup>21</sup>

After the other gods had given Re this advice, Hathor was sent to slay mankind. In the following the text does not explain how this happens, it refers only of the returning of the goddess (V.49-52):

"The goddess returned after slaying mankind in the desert,  
And the majesty of this god said:  
'Welcome in peace, Hathor, Eye who did what I came for!'"<sup>22</sup>

This short dialogue between the sun-god and his daughter Hathor is followed by a second sequence, which explains that Re does not want to kill all mankind. He comes up with a ploy to deceive Hathor. A beverage of red ochre beer-mash, which looks like human blood, was prepared and distributed throughout the whole land. The goddess drank and when she came back, she was drunken and had not annihilated mankind. Subsequently, the aetiology of a cult was founded, where at a special "feast of Hathor" an alcoholic beer-mash was prepared.<sup>23</sup>

The example of the goddess Hathor shows that the concept of divine messengers in Ancient Egypt is highly complex. It is linked with a hierarchical world of gods and the distinction between different functions. Hathor appears to Re as a subordinate deity with the single duty to annihilate mankind. The following story corresponds to this reduction in the meaning of Hathor. Once let go, Re is unable to stop Hathor, rather he has to use a ploy to protect mankind from the dangerous and wild goddess. In this plot, Hathor appears more as a terrifying animal than as an important goddess. Regarding the topic of this article the aforementioned terminological problem is striking. If we were to look only at this text, Hathor would be called a 'demon', because she is subordinate and negatively determined. But in fact she is one of the main female deities of Ancient Egypt, with a large number of different character attributes. The example shows that divine messengers are primarily functionally determined and need not be intermediate beings. In

21 Lichtheim, *Literature II* 198.

22 Lichtheim, *Literature II* 199.

23 See Assmann, *Ägypten* 139, and for a further discussion von Lieven, *Wein* 47ff.

addition to this the example shows the systematic position of divine messengers in Egyptian religion. This position is based on a specific concept of the world. In the mythological tale of "The Destruction of Mankind" there is a fundamental distinction between a divine world and the world of man. The following third part of the myth contains the separation of heaven and earth and between deities and mankind.<sup>24</sup> Henceforth, mankind is on its own and fighting against each other, as the text relates.<sup>25</sup>

To sum up, we can conclude firstly that the received concept of divine messengers is combined with those of 'intermediate beings'.<sup>26</sup> It stands for deities, who communicate between the gods and man.<sup>27</sup> Where the distance between the main and often 'distant' deities becomes larger, these messengers become important in order to assure communication between the world of god and the world of man. From a more theoretical point of view, the main function of divine messengers seems to be to overcome both the spatial as well as the temporal 'interdependence-interruption' which occurs in the wake of increasing hierarchization of a religion.<sup>28</sup> According to this, divine messengers need not be subordinate deities in general, rather they are a functional concept, to be determined as the case arises. The example of the goddess Hathor merely shows that also deities at the top of the pantheon can act as divine messengers and therefore appear in a subordinate role.

## 2. Divine Messengers and Intermediate Beings

According to the functional determination of divine messengers and intermediate beings, it is not surprising that the Egyptian language does not have a specific hieroglyphic sign for a subordinate deity. Gods and deities are normally determined with the Netjer-sign  $\overline{\text{I}}$ , the falcon on a standard  $\text{A}$  or a sitting person with wig and ceremonial beard,<sup>29</sup> no matter whether it is the state god Amun-Re or a local and more marginal deity. In Egyptology these local and more minor deities are

24 See Assmann, *Ägypten* 140.

25 Assmann, *Ägypten* 140.

26 See Lang, *Zwischenwesen* 419, and Lang, *Mittelwesen* 146. Ahn has used the term of 'Grenzgänger' (border crosser), see Ahn, *Grenzgängerkonzepte* 40f.

27 See Lang, *Zwischenwesen* 418f.

28 See Gladigow, *Plenitudo deorum* 12, and also Lang, *'Zwischenwesen'* 415, who quotes the Platonian philosopher Apuleius von Madaura.

29 See Kurth, *Suum Cuique* 55.

often referred to as 'demons', especially if they have negative attributes.<sup>30</sup> If we let this problematic term be, 'demons' seem to be subordinate to deities which are part of the dynamic and fluid system of Ancient Egyptian religion. This can be illustrated by another text which mentioned some of the main gods and also some minor and subordinate deities: the myth of the fight between the sun-god and the serpent. This legend is based on the concept of the journey of the sun, where the sun-god is born in the morning, grows up during the day and dies in the evening, to be recreated during the night.<sup>31</sup> The nightly journey is explained in the so called "Underworld Books". In the morning, but also in the evening, when the sun-god is weak, he must be protected by other divine beings.<sup>32</sup> In the texts these deities are given different names, e.g. as *šm3tyw*, *wꜣꜣtyw* or *ḥ3tyw*. A part of this group are also the 77 deities of *šdꜣw*. In Egyptology these 77 gods are labelled "dieu panthée", because they consist of a number of changing aspects which could unite to one single being.<sup>33</sup> One example for such a "dieu panthée" is the male god Bes. He appears as a fighting deity, armed with knives, annihilating the enemies of the sun-god.<sup>34</sup> A papyrus of the late period gives an impression of this (pBrooklyn 47.218.156, II,1-2):

"Living reptiles (ddft) perish on the sight of him (= sun god), not being able to survive on sight of your (= Bes) great and wonderful body comprising nine heads on one neck.  
One has the face of a Bes.  
One has the face of a ram.  
One has the face of a falcon.  
One has the face of a crocodile.  
One has the face of a hippo.  
One has the face of a lion.  
One has the face of a bull.  
One has the face of a baboon.  
One has the face of a tom."<sup>35</sup>

In the myth of the sun-god these 77 gods are confronted by the 77 assistants of his enemy of the sun-god, the *msw Bds̄t*. In a text from the Ramesside period these deities are associated with the god Seth:

"If you (= the poison) are really a dog (iwiw), Baba is coming out of the desert with his 77 greyhounds with him ... Baba is standing before him (= Horus). He is attacking Horus and biting in his lower leg (sdh)."<sup>36</sup>

30 Kurth, Suum Cuique 50.

31 See Quirke, Religion 35-42.

32 See Koch, Geschichte 40.

33 Leitz, Tagewählerei 244f.; with note 18 and for a critical discussion of this concept Quack, Pantheos 175-190.

34 For further information see Altenmüller, Bes 722, and Bonnet, Reallexikon 108f.

35 See for the translation Leitz, Tagewählerei 248f. (text 24).

The desert as the area of chaos and the main place of the god Seth is combined with the messengers, which were referred to as 77 greyhounds. The passage also exemplifies the main duties of the divine messengers: They should kill or punish and bring disease and harm.<sup>37</sup> The striking point is that these messengers act clearly as subordinate deities by order of a superordinate god. Therefore the function as a messenger acting in such a way could be covered not only by independent gods like Hathor or Bes, but also by subordinate deities, who seem to be limited in their function by this duty. Another example for this concept of messengers are the *ḥ3tyw*-beings, which appear especially in medicine-magical texts.

## 2.1 The *ḥ3tyw*-Beings

The *ḥ3tyw*-beings have normally been seen in Egyptology as 'demons', because of their primarily negative function and their subordinate character.<sup>38</sup> They act as messengers of Sakhmet, who represents as a lion-faced goddess a wild and dangerous aspect.<sup>39</sup> Because of her function as a battlesome goddess, who stamps on the enemies by orders of the king, we can find the notion of Sakhmet as ruler of illness, pest and plague. She shoots arrows and burns up the limbs of the enemies with her scorching breath.<sup>40</sup> In the well-known story of Sinuhe there is one passage where the fear of the king in the foreign countries is described as the "fear of Sakhmet in the year of plague."<sup>41</sup> In another source, a text of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty (New Kingdom), the task of shooting arrows is assumed by the *ḥ3tyw*-beings (pLeiden I 346, I, 3-5):

"Greetings to you, *ḥ3tyw*-beings, henchmen of Sakhmet, who come out of the eye of Re, messengers through districts, who massacre and raise rebellion, who run through the land shooting arrows from their mouths."<sup>42</sup>

As in the myth of The Destruction of Mankind, the messengers are linked with the eye of the god Re. And moreover, in a cosmological

36 See for the translation Leitz, Tagewählerei 248 (text 22).

37 See also Meeks, Génies 45.

38 See von Lieven, Himmel 50; Leitz, Tagewählerei 244; Westendorff, Handbuch II 743; Kaper, God 61; Firchow, Boten 90 uses the term "divine messengers".

39 Sternberg, Sachmet 324.

40 See Sternberg, Sachmet 325, and Koch, Geschichte 388f.

41 Lichtheim, Literature I 225. Nearly the same expression can be found in the Edfu inscriptions, see Kaper, God 63.

42 See for the translation Leitz, Tagewählerei 247 (text 9).



inscription of Esna-Temple the *ḥ3tyw* are armed like Sakhmet with knives and arrows.<sup>43</sup>

"Greetings to you, children of Re, who appear at his bidding,  
Ennead of primitive times, when you circuit daily on his route,  
living B3.w of the gods, daily,  
when they come out of the eye of Re,  
messengers in the towns and districts  
shooting arrows from their mouths at those, whom they can see far away."

These *ḥ3.tjw*-messengers can be combined with other divine messengers.<sup>44</sup> A papyrus from the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty (New Kingdom) mentioned different terms for such messengers (pEdwin Smith, XVIII, 11-15):

"Another (spell) for the fending of the winds of bitter feeling, the *ḥ3tyw*, the *ngstyw*, the *wpwtyw* of Sakhmet. Stand back *ḥ3tyw*! The breeze should not touch me, therefore those passing by not can pass by to rage against my face. I am Horus, who passed by the *šm3yw* of Sakhmet, Horus, the son of Sakhmet. I am the one, the son of Bastet, I will not die because of you".<sup>45</sup>

The focus of the passage is not on a general massacre in the land, but on the fate of the individual men and their welfare. The quoted text is part of a medical papyrus with a number of remedies and symbolic acts against illness.<sup>46</sup> It refers to the main principle of Egyptian religion, the magical worldview. The speaker puts himself on a level with Horus, the son of Sakhmet, to whom the diverse divine messengers can do no harm. Moreover, the passage displays the hierarchical structure of the divine world and the clear subordination of the *ḥ3tyw*. They can be neutralized with the support of the deities, which are more powerful.

The text is also interesting because it contains some other terms for divine messengers, like *ngstyw*, *šm3yw* or *wpwtyw*. Especially the latter is, as Alexandra von Lieven has pointed out, a kind of a 'generic term' for the *ḥ3tyw* or *šm3yw*.<sup>47</sup> In pHier. BM each of these three terms is associated with another deity:

"We will save him from the hands of the *ḥ3tyw* of the demons of Sakhmet, the *šm3yw* of Bastet, the *wpwtyw* of Atum, the gods (of the book)".

The main point concerning the *ḥ3tyw* is that from the beginning of Egyptian religion they have a subordinate character. They are already mentioned in the Pyramid Texts from the Old Kingdom and are associated with the god Sopdu, as spell 578 relates (Pyr 1535a-c).<sup>48</sup>

43 See von Lieven, Himmel 54.

44 See Kaper, God 61, with more examples.

45 See Leitz, Tagewählerei 247 (text 10), and Westendorff, Handbuch II 743.

46 See for further information Westendorff, Handbuch II 742f.

47 See von Lieven, Himmel 53.

48 Translation by Leitz, Tagewählerei 246 (text 2).

"The scourge is in your (= Sopdu) hand, the mks-scepter behind your hand. The *ḥ3tyw* fall down on their faces, the circumpolar stars are kneeling before you."

The *ḥ3tyw* are obviously combined with the decan stars. The text describes the god Sopdu, ruler of the foreign lands, as a powerful ruler, before whom the decan stars and also the circumpolar stars fall down. This combination between the *ḥ3tyw* and the concept of stars can also be found in the Coffin Texts<sup>49</sup> and some sources from Ptolemaic time. Joachim Friedrich Quack has already pointed out that the *ḥ3tyjw* are the seven deathly decans of the netherworld which bring illness and death.<sup>50</sup> Therefore in texts from the late period the *ḥ3tyw* appear as executors of the divine punishment. In the so called Inaros story (Papyrus Krall) they were sent by Osiris to raise a battle (pKrall 1.4 und 1.5).<sup>51</sup>

(1.4) Osiris called "Lover-of-Battle" and "Vengeance-of-Horus", the two demons.

(1.5) He said to them: Hasten to earth! Go to Heliopolis and let battle commence ..."

A similar passage can be found in the myth Leiden 3,4f. There a female vulture, who was robbed of her young by a cat, asked the god Re for revenge. Therefore he sent a *ḥ3ty*, who punished the vulture.<sup>52</sup>

If we sum up, we can easily ascertain that the *ḥ3tyw*-beings have a clearly negative function. On the one hand they stand for the communication between a distant god and the world of man, on the other they are associated with illness and death.<sup>53</sup> But according to the principles of Egyptian religion it is also possible by magic and symbolic acts to protect oneself against the dangerous divine messengers. The so-called magical spells for mother and child from the Middle Kingdom give an example for this special meaning:<sup>54</sup>

"Go away whom, who comes from the darkness ... If you are coming, to kiss this child, I won't let you kiss it. If you are coming to harm it, I won't let you harm it. ... I have got his spell for protection obtained from Afa-herb."

49 See CT VI, 107d-f and Leitz, Tagewählerei 246 (Text 6).

50 Quack, Rezension Leitz 283f.

51 Hoffmann, Kampf 132f. See also the parallel to the Inaros story of P. Krall on the Demotic Narratives from the Tebtunis Temple Library: Ryholt, Parallel 164.

52 See Lieven, Himmel 52 with note 201.

53 See for other references Lieven, Himmel 54.

54 See for this text the new edition by Yamazaki, Zaubersprüche, and for the quoted passage Kurth, Suum cuique 56.

2.2 The concept of *wpwtyw*

Whereas the concept of *ḥ3tyw* describes negative and subordinate deities, the meaning of *wpwtyw* in Egyptian religion is quite different. As mentioned above, the word can be used as a generic term for divine messengers and it includes also a positive meaning. If we start with the term itself, the word *wpwtyw* firstly contains the messenger or envoy in general.<sup>55</sup> In the Old Kingdom the term referred to a socially high ranking official assigned to the *vesir*. His main duties were to deliver messages, especially in diplomatic affairs.<sup>56</sup> In the Middle Kingdom and namely in the New Kingdom the term refers to diplomats and political envoys.<sup>57</sup> Religious texts like the Book of Dead used the term for divine messengers who could have a negative association (e.g. a crocodile deity).<sup>58</sup> An interesting passage can be found in the well known narrative of Wenamun. Because of the special significance of this text for the distinction between a human messenger and a divine one, it is necessary to go into more detail.<sup>59</sup>

The narrative of Wenamun tells a story about a priest named Wenamun, who was supposed to obtain cedar wood from Lebanon that was needed to build a new procession boat for the god Amun. Wenamun set off on his journey with a letter of recommendation and – as the story tells later – a statuette with the name “Amun-of-the-Road”. During his journey a number of incidents occurred<sup>60</sup> and when Wenamun arrived in Byblos, at first he was not admitted to the lord of the city. But then the god Amun-Re himself intervened and procured a local oracle medium. This changed the situation completely and Wenamun was allowed to meet Tjekker-Baal, the lord of Byblos. The following passage of the narrative contains a longer dialogue, where the real reason for his journey, to obtain timber for the procession boat of the Theban god Amun-Re, becomes more and more insignificant.<sup>61</sup> The main focus is on the claim of the god Amun-Re to the Lebanon, which is confronted by the counterclaim of Tjekker-Baal, the lord of Byblos. In this dialogue Wenamun said to the lord of Byblos:

“(2,53) As for Chaemwese, the envoys he sent you were men. And he himself was a man (2,54). You have not here one of his envoys, though you

55 See Valloggia, Recherche 1 (§ 100).

56 Valloggia, Recherche 30 (§ 107).

57 See Otto, Bote 846.

58 So e.g. in Book of the Dead, Chapter 31; see Lucarelli, Demons 205f.

59 A good English translation can be found by Lichtheim, Literature II 224-230.

60 See Rößler-Köhler Reise, 137-139, and Baines, Wenamun 215f.

61 Eyre, Irony 238f.

could say: ‘Go and see your companions’. Should you not rejoice (2,55) and have a stela made for yourself, and say on it: ‘Amun-Re, King of Gods, sent me Amun-of-the-Road, his (2,56) envoy – he should be alive, safe and healthy – together with Wenamun, his human envoy, in quest of timber for the great and noble bark of Amun-Re, King of Gods.’”

The crucial point in this passage is that there is an explicit distinction between the “human envoy” Wenamun and the divine messenger, the statuette “Amun-of-the-Road”.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the messengers of the pharaoh “Chaemwese” as well as “Chaemwese” himself were referred to as human envoys. The passage reflects the change of the Egyptian royal ideology after the end of the New Kingdom, when the god Amun-Re was worshipped as the most important king and the divine character of the king, which was traditionally a main part of the royal ideology in Ancient Egypt, was assigned to the god itself.<sup>63</sup> The “Chaemwese” is supposed to be Ramses IX., one of the last rulers of the New Kingdom.<sup>64</sup> In the hieroglyphic papyri the divine messenger is insofar determined as ‘divine’ as the author of the narrative uses the typical formulae *„nh(.w), wḏb(.w) snb(.w)’* (he should be alive, safe and healthy), which is normally used for gods or the divine pharaoh. According to this, Wenamun is called a “human envoy” (*wpwty rmḏ*).<sup>65</sup> This distinction is also the main point of the narrative itself, because the text distinguishes between the human envoy and the divine messenger. The first fails across the board, whereas the latter brings about the change.<sup>66</sup> This can be seen in a passage which relates the dialogue between Wenamun and Tjekker-Baal. Wenamun responded to the reproach of Tjekker-Baal that his travels are foolish by alluding to the incident at the harbour of Byblos, where he has to wait for 29 days before Amun-Re intervenes himself:

“(2,22) I said to him: (2,23) Wrong! These are not foolish travels that I am doing! There is no ship on the river that does (2,24) not belong to Amun. His is the sea and his is the Lebanon of which you say: ‘It is mine’. (...) [Trully], it was Amun-Re, King of Gods, who said to Herihor, (2,26) my master: ‘Send me!’ And he made me come with this great god. But look, you have let (2,27) this great god spend these 29 days moored in your harbour, without knowing that he is there?”

The statuette of Amun-Re is referred to as the “great god” and therefore with as representative of Amun itself. Something quite similar can be

62 See Valloggia, Recherche 40 (§ 108).

63 See for this concept Römer, Gottesherrschaft 324.

64 See Schipper, Wenamun 208, and for the birthname of Ramesses XI. von Beckerath, Handbuch 174 (N 10).

65 See the hieroglyphic text by Gardiner, Stories 72 (2,56).

66 See Schipper, Erzählung 280, and Baines, Wenamun 217.

found on a stela of the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty and thus from the time where the narrative of Wenamun could be dated. This inscription, the so-called 'stela of the banishment', contains an oracle of the god Amun to the high priest Menkheperre.

"(16) Then the great god agreed greatly (...) Then he stepped again before the great god, saying (...) (18) Then the great god agreed emphatically".

The epitheton "great god" (*nfr* 3) refers to the cult-image of the god. It can be assumed that the narrative of Wenamun does not refer to the cult-image of Amun-Re, but to a statuette of the God, like those exemplars, which have often been found in Syria-Palestine.<sup>67</sup> In the plot of the story, the statuette expresses as a divine envoy the power of the god Amun-Re and his claim on the territory of Syria-Palestine. Therefore the main focus of the narrative is on the question of the power of the god Amun-Re over the former provinces of Egypt which were lost during the last pharaohs of the New Kingdom. The narrative has a political intention, communicated by religious propaganda.<sup>68</sup>

If we look at the concept of the divine messengers, several aspects are interesting. In the narrative of Wenamun two different actors appear as envoys. On the one hand the statuette itself, which is understood as divine messenger, and on the other the human envoy. Both were denominated with the word *wpwty*, but differently determined. The statuette symbolised the power of the god itself, who acts through this divine envoy. This is important in a double sense, because normally a deity acts through another god, and – furthermore – the concept of *wpwty* does not have a negative connotation like the *wpwtyw* of Sachmet or Atum. The divine messenger has a positive function: he stands for a political claim and acts in order of the highest god, the god Amun-Re.

### 2.3 The god Thoth

A similar notion as a messenger of the highest god of all is connected with the god Thoth. He appears already in Pharaonic Egypt as divine messenger, and in the Greek period he was combined with Hermes.<sup>69</sup> Sometimes he was regarded as archetype for the Christian conception of the angel Michael. In an article which appeared in 1956, the Egyptologist and religious scholar Günter Lanczkowski wanted to show a

67 For further references see Schipper, *Erzählung* 180f.

68 See for this religious aspect Eyre, *Irony* 242, and Egberts, *Times* 101.

69 See Doxey, *Thot* 398.

few similarities between Thoth and Michael.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, these similarities are too unspecific to see any close connection,<sup>71</sup> although the god Thoth is quite interesting for the question of divine messengers in Ancient Egypt.

Thoth was worshipped from the Early Dynastic period through Roman times. Primarily a moon deity he became the main god of scribes and writings. Thot can be combined with other deities, for instance as son of Horus or of Osiris. Highly important is the connection with the sun-god Re. Some sources of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty refer to him as "son of re", and also in Pyramid Texts Thot is associated to the sun god.<sup>72</sup> Both were referred to as "the two companions, who cross over the sky" (Pyr. 128 b-c).<sup>73</sup> With the function of a lunar god, Thoth also appears in the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead: "I know what is small on the second day and large on the fifteenth: the god Thoth".<sup>74</sup> In Ptolemaic temple inscriptions, Thoth can be seen as regulator of the phases of the moon.<sup>75</sup>

His importance as divine messenger is founded by his role in the Osiris legend and in the divine judgement in the Book of the Dead (Chapter 125). In the Osiris legend he assists Horus and Anubis in reconstructing the body of Osiris and teaches Isis the spells necessary to revive Osiris. He replaces the head of Isis after Horus cuts it off in a rage, and finally, he helps to bring the proceedings to a conclusion by suggesting that the Ennead contact Osiris for his opinion.<sup>76</sup> In accordance with his association with Maat he can appear in illustrations of the divine judgement. Thot is the one who welcomes the deceased and leads him to the deities of the hall of judgement. In Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead we can read:<sup>77</sup>

"I will not make mention of you", says the guardian of the door of this Hall, "unless you tell me my name."

"Discerner of hearts and searcher of the reins" is your name.

"Who is the god that dwells in his hour?"

Speak to the interpreter of the two lands.

"Who is this?"

"The interpreter of the two lands – that is Thoth."

70 Cf. Lanczkowski, *Thot* 117-127. Görg, *Mythos* 100, has already voted for a connection between Thot and the angel Gabriel.

71 See the criticism of Müller, *Engellehre* 89 note 673.

72 See Doxey, *Thot* 398 and Lanczkowski, *Thot* 122.

73 See Kurth, *Thot* 504.

74 Kurth, *Thot* 504, and Wilkinson, *Gods* 215f.

75 See Kurth, *Thot* 505.

76 See Doxey, *Thot* 400.

77 See for the translation Hornung, *Totenbuch* 243f.



The following passage explains how Thoth reports the deceased to the lord of the netherworld, the god Osiris. Thoth has obviously the duty to communicate between gods and men. With this function he is named in another text, the so-called "myth of the birth of the Godking". The mythological tale reports of the god Amun, telling a council of gods in heaven that he wants to have an heir to the throne conceived. He sends the god Thot as envoy with a message to the queen:<sup>78</sup>

"Spoken by Thoth, the lord of Hermopolis: [Pleased is] Amun with your real dignity as *rp<sup>tt</sup>*, great in grace, mistress of pleasantness, sweet in love like Atum, ruler of all countries"

Thot delivers the queen the message that the god Amun has given her a higher rank (as a *rp<sup>tt</sup>*). He does not proclaim to her the birth of a child – this is reserved to the god – but Amun's pleasure.<sup>79</sup>

The connection between Thot and the highest god appears also in Temple texts from the Ptolemaic period. There Thot is travelling to Nubia for the god Re to pacify the raging Tefnut and persuade her to return to Egypt.<sup>80</sup> This positive notion of the god Thoth is crucial insofar, as he can also have negative significance. He can appear as a violent and dangerous deity, for instance in an inscription from Wadi Charig (Sinai), where he is mentioned as "Lord of the massacre, who suppresses Asia" or in the Book of Death, where he decapitates the enemies of the deceased.<sup>81</sup> As a deity, associated to Re, he joined the nightly journey of the sun, where one of his duties is to bring the enemies of Re to death. Thot adopted here the role of the god Seth, which is a negative one according to the Egyptian system of gods.<sup>82</sup>

### 3. Summary

It could not be the aim of a short article to give a comprehensive overview of the difficult and complex question of divine messengers in Ancient Egypt. But this brief presentation of the main sources has revealed a few points which could be interesting for the topic of this anthology. The first point is that in Egypt we cannot speak of angels or demons. The Egyptian religion with its dynamic system and its ambiguous world of gods knows no favourable or hostile divine messen-

gers. According to the evidence, the concept of divine messengers is primarily a functional one which is determined as the case arises. Therefore, also deities at the top of the pantheon like Thot or Hathor can act as envoys of a god and thus in a subordinate role. On the other hand we have basically to distinguish between such independent gods as Hathor or Thoth, who could act as envoys, and subordinated deities, which solely function as divine messengers. As could be seen in the — 3tyw, in the sense of dependent subordinated beings, these gods bring illness and harm. In contrast to the independent gods they have solely a negative significance.

The second main point is the combination of the concept of divine messengers with the cosmological system of Egyptian Religion in general: the concept based on the general distinction between a world of gods and a world of man. This can be seen in the mythological tale of 'The Destruction of Mankind', where the concept of divine messengers is explicitly combined with a cosmological order. In this worldview it seems to be one of the main duties of the divine messengers to guarantee the communication between these two separate spheres. According to the medical and magical texts they are bringing harm, but the example of the god Thoth shows that a messenger of god could also act in a favourable way. Furthermore, one of the probably most interesting references is the narrative of Wenamun with its distinction between a "divine" and a "human envoy". This passage can be understood in the way that obviously only a representative of the divine world can act as a messenger of god, and not human beings. In the narrative of Wenamun it is the god Amun himself, who slipped into the role of the envoy and expresses as the statuette 'Amun-of-the-Road' his political-religious claim.

If we proceed from the example of the Egyptian religion to a more systematic perspective, the concept of divine messengers reflects the prevalence, professionalisation and hierarchization of a religion. With the concept of a highest and also distant god, a space is opened for subordinated deities which communicated with other gods or with the world of man. According to this, the 'divine messengers' can be seen as 'intermediate beings', albeit primarily in a functional sense. Their main duty is to bridge over the distance between god and man, especially when due to the hierarchization of religion the space between both spheres becomes wider and wider.

78 Brunner, Geburt 80 (VILLA).

79 See Brunner, Geburt 81, and Kügler, Pharao 43f.

80 See Doxey, Thot 399.

81 Kurth, Thot 503.

82 See Kurth, Thot 503.



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